A Genealogy of Media Studies

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain why the subject media studies looks and sounds the way it does today through the production of a genealogy of the subject. The questions addressed are first, why was this subject introduced into the curriculum in the 1970s? Secondly, how has knowledge in the subject been defined and contested, how and why has it changed in the course of the subject's history? Thirdly, which knowledge attains the status of truth and becomes the accepted definition of what the subject is about?

The theoretical perspective adopted in this study draws from both postmodernist critiques and sociologies of subject knowledge. It presents a critical sociology of knowledge that draws insights from both social historians of school subjects and the work of Michel Foucault. The study draws a distinction between knowledge as defined by formal educational authorities (articulated in syllabuses) and knowledge defined by those practising the subject (teachers and curriculum advisors).

Introduction

This work attempts to construct a genealogy of media education. Subject histories provide 'a window on the wider educational and political culture of a country' (Goodson 1992, p. 25). They can serve the same function as ethnography in '"making the familiar strange" . . . by documenting the origins of contemporary phenomena whose existence we take for granted as "natural" rather than as the product of history' (Hammersley 1984, p. 16). Ideally, this history will serve both functions but its immediate purpose is to provide critical insights into the current status of, and the conflicts surrounding, media studies in Western Australia at this time. Media studies has existed as a school subject for thirty years and yet it remains in a marginal position. There are no promotional opportunities for teachers of media studies and no university in the state accepts the subject for admission purposes. Some of the teachers interviewed for this study described themselves as the 'poor relation' of English and spoke of their resentment of newer subjects like drama and computer studies, both of which have tertiary entrance status. They described their lives as a

continual struggle for recognition of the subject, a place on the school timetable and a fair allocation of resources. The study, then, is a response to Kincheloe's warning that 'When the past is forgotten its power over the present is hidden from view' (1997, p. xxxvi). It is a partial history in that the case examined is the school subject 'media studies' in Western Australia and therefore it cannot claim to speak for all iterations of the subject nor even all Australian states. Hopefully however, it will offer insights into the history of media studies which will inform both curriculum history and media educators.

During the last twenty years many socio-historical studies of school subjects have been published (Goodson 1983, 1985, 1988, 1992, 1997, Goodson and Ball 1984, Ball 1985, 1987, Seddon 1989, Goodson and Marsh 1996). These histories reveal that school subjects have always been contested sites, domains in which struggles for the controlling definition of philosophy, content and practice are played out. The work that has been done on English, for example, shows that the subject has always been discussed in terms of conflicting social and political agendas in which English is subjected to struggles of will over appropriate content between various academic factions and buffeted by institutional struggles over meaning and resources (Mathieson 1975, Ball 1985, 1987, Ball, Kenny and Gardiner 1990, Medway 1990, Willinsky 1991, Green, Hodgens and Luke 1994, Green and Beavis 1996). These forces have determined the shape of the subject and the way it has been taught at different points in time.

The origins and development of media studies have also been widely examined (Masterman 1980, 1983, 1985, Alvarado et al. 1987, Halloran and Jones 1985, Pungente 1985, Fraser 1990, Masterman and Mariet 1994, Buckingham 1998, Tyner 1998). All generally agree that the history of media education has been characterised by defensiveness although it has taken many forms. In the United Kingdom the primary motivation for media education until the 1960s appears to have been cultural protectionism, in which the aim of teaching about the media was to expose its limitations and lack of cultural value (Masterman 1980, 1983, 1985, Alvarado et al. 1987, Buckingham 1998). In the seventies in Britain a form of political protectionism emerged whereby media education might be the tool by which the dominant ideology could be revealed and resisted (Buckingham 1999). In the United States media education emerged as a form of moral protectionism in that the aim of media teaching was to challenge the sex, violence and unhealthy moral messages of the media (Tyner 1998). However, the evidence collected for this study supports a different view of the roots of the subject in Western Australia. It will be argued that in this case media studies emerged in response to the problem of how schools might manage less academically able students who were choosing to remain in school beyond the minimum school-leaving age.

The construction of the study

This genealogy of media studies draws on the work of Michel Foucault and in particular his concept of discursive formations for its theoretical framework. Foucault offers exciting possibilities because he demands that the researcher not simply seek to describe the dominant discourses of media education in any historical period but to ask new questions about how the discourses came to be and to examine the patterns of 'force' that make possible particular thoughts and actions. Foucault challenges some of the key assumptions underpinning sociological criticism. He argues that the historian cannot access the past, only 'discursive formations', that is, evidence of how contemporaries recorded and understood their own times (Foucault 1988, p. 10). Furthermore, he refutes the idea that the history of knowledge is a history of progress (Cousins and Hussain 1984, p. 264, Smart 1985). The 'traditional history of ideas' assumes that knowledge follows a line of progress, new knowledge is accumulated and new theories absorbed, but the history of media studies in Western Australia is not a simple story of improvement and advancement. Finally, Foucault's complex understanding of power offers a way of understanding how the supposedly powerless, the classroom teachers in fact, wield immense power in determining the nature and content of the subject they teach. Power, he says, is not the preserve of powerful agents because it is co-constituted by those who support and resist it. Foucault urges us not to look for the 'headquarters' of power: 'neither the caste which governs, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, not those who make the most important economic decisions direct the entire network of power that functions in a society (and makes it function)' (Foucault 1981, p. 95).

These Foucauldian tenets invite a different way of looking at the history of a school subject because the target of analysis is 'not institutions, theories or ideology – but practices – with the aim of grasping the conditions which make them acceptable at a given moment' (Foucault 1991, p. 76). Thus it is not necessary to seek a totalising theory that will explain how things come to be as they are, and discontinuities and contradictions can be accounted for through an analysis of local and specific discursive practices.

Discourse, in Foucault's terms, is a set of statements around a topic that acts to both constrain and enable what we can know about the topic (Foucault 1973b, 1977). Discourses are produced by specialists and/or those in a position to make authoritative statements about an object of knowledge and therefore are historically contingent and subject to change (McHoul and Grace 1993, p. 31). Discourses, then, are about disciplinary knowledge. In the case of media studies those working in the discipline such as academics, teacher trainers, theorists, educational authorities, subject advisers, consultants, textbook book publishers and teachers are all active in creating the discourses of the school subject. Discourse defines and produces our

objects of knowledge. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Equally discourse rules out, limits and restricts other ways of talking and conducting oneself. The findings of this study suggest that the discourses of media studies have severely restricted both what might be studied under its name and the manner in which it may be taught. For example, magazines and comics have always been legitimate objects of study within the subject's discourse while books have been excluded. Similarly, issues of ownership and control are studied in relation to television and newspapers but not book publishing, despite the fact books are most surely a mass medium. Equally the discourse of media studies in the seventies limited the approach to instruction in media studies to a single method; one based on extensive student media production. But discourses are not fixed and unchanging over time. Thus the discourse of media studies eventually came to include new objects of study such as video games and the Internet and new pedagogical approaches like textual analysis.

The task is to identify key elements of discourses within media studies and understand their effects. What knowledge does the discourse mandate as appropriate to the discipline? Who do these discourses produce as authorised to teach and learn about the media? What knowledge, bodies and ways of teaching are consigned through omission or derogation to outside the realm of discourse? The aim is not to offer a blueprint for the future but rather to seek to show that 'things are not as self-evident as once believed' and that 'as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible' (Foucault 1988b, p. 155).

Empirical evidence for the history of the subject was collected from six primary sources (Yin 1984, Stake 1995). These were:

- documents including syllabus committee agendas and minutes, syllabus documents, annual reports, commissioned reports, and official memoranda to schools on common assessment tasks;
- archival materials from three decades of media education: teachers' programs, lesson notes, duplicated hand-out material, test and examination papers, personal letters, professional association newsletters and textbooks;
- physical artifacts: teaching resources including video and audiotapes, tape slide presentations, films, student work samples;
- interviews with teachers both in recorded interview situations and informally with teachers at professional association meetings and social gatherings. In addition teacher educators, past and present, Education Department officials and media studies advisory personnel, and heads of departments were canvassed for their views;

- direct observation of teachers giving lessons in media studies and in discussion about their own teaching practices;
- participant observation of media studies syllabus committee meetings and meetings of the executive of the professional association.

Genealogical roots

In Western Australia the motivation for media education, or rather its realisation in the school subject media studies, was, for the most part, unrelated to its object of study – the mass media. Rather media studies emerged in Western Australia as one response to the problem of constructing a curriculum suitable for students in the post-compulsory years of schooling who did not have aspirations towards university. At the time of its insertion into the curriculum the education system was in a period of rapid transition and media studies was the contingent outcome of the forces of change. Up until the 1960s the education system had been dominated by a public examinations system. The list of subjects set for public examinations and hence for study in schools had remained unchanged for more than forty years. What constituted worthwhile knowledge was that which was 'the province exclusively of the mind; divided by its own logic into the boundaries of disciplines . . . the province of a select few, for whose membership there must be competition . . . its acquisition assessed by norm-referenced testing' (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1987, pp. 19–20). As secondary school retention increased the social and financial cost of the system became apparent. At the same time teachers and parents were demanding a more relevant curriculum that would cater for the ever-growing numbers of non-university-bound students who were completing high school. A series of government reports on the education system resulted in the abolition of the public examinations system and the introduction of a new system. The key features were:

- a philosophy that the aims of education were the integration into society, the physical and mental health, economic competence and emotional and spiritual growth of every student;
- the differentiation of courses in secondary schools according to student ability;
- the expansion of the number of optional subjects available for study in addition to the core and compulsory subjects of English, science, mathematics and social studies;
- the introduction of internal school assessment;
- the provision for school-based course design and implementation (Education Department of Western Australia 1969, pp. 1–64);

- a statement that said schooling 'for all children ought to be enjoyable and fruitful in itself, not merely a preparation for later life' (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission 1973, p. 94).

These changes were critical in opening up a space in which a subject like media studies could be imagined. First, they allowed for the development of subjects targeted specifically at the less academically able student. Secondly, such subjects could be 'enjoyable and fruitful' but not necessarily vocational. Thirdly, in valuing skills other than those of writing and memorising they opened the way for a subject like media studies which would neither rely upon, nor promote, traditional literacy skills. Lastly, and most importantly, they shifted the power to construct knowledge away from the educational bureaucracy to the schools. Media studies was a subject that fitted the new liberal discourse of education. It favoured the practical over the theoretical and was thus seen as appropriate for the less academically able who had been marginalised within the examination system. Furthermore, it presented itself as relevant to the lives of students in that it dealt with contemporary popular culture.

In the Western Australian context media studies was a contingent phenomenon arising from the intersection of specific discourses around the topics of flexible curriculum, student needs and curriculum relevance. The effect of these discourses was to open a space for a new subject that would be intellectually appropriate for a certain sector of the school population, enjoyable in itself and relevant to the lives of students living in an increasingly image-dominated culture. At the same time the liberalisation of the curriculum constrained media studies in that it defined the sort of subject it must be. Media studies was defined from its inception as a subject suited to students of low academic ability. It was to be applied, potentially creative, but must not tax the literacy skills of students. Thus from the very beginning media studies has been a non-academic subject and this fact has always constrained the sort of knowledge deemed appropriate to the subject.

Disciplinary knowledge in the early years of media studies: the seventies

Foucault argues that the appearance and reappearance of forms of knowledge must be identified by reference to specific means (Foucault 1972, p. 26). The means of producing the disciplinary knowledge embraced by a school subject are multiple. In all school subjects knowledge production happens in such sites as initial teacher training, in-service and professional development courses, syllabus committees, academic writing, and the curriculum development sections of the educational bureaucracy. All of these sites have a formal and authoritative role in the production

of knowledge. However, there exist other, non-authoritative, locations for the production of disciplinary knowledge. These include, but are not limited to, professional associations, the classroom, the staffroom, the casual social encounter and the chance conversation. The knowledge produced in all of these sites is circulated through both formal and informal means: syllabus documents, curriculum resources, academic journals, textbooks, formal and informal teacher networks, subject listserves and newsletters and through the exchange of the artifacts of teaching such as programs, lesson notes and the like. In an ideal world 'official subject knowledge' represented by the syllabuses and the 'unofficial' knowledge articulated in subject newsletters, teaching programs and resources would be congruent. However the evidence suggests that, in the Western Australian context at least, this has never been the case.

A syllabus is a textual intervention into practice on the part of the educational authorities. Its purpose is to guide teachers as to what should be taught. Media studies syllabuses in WA have passed through dozens of iterations, too numerous to detail here, but it is possible to identify some broad transformations in 'official subject knowledge'. The early syllabuses were marked by an emphasis on the 'relationship between political and economic power groups and the mass media' and 'the power of the media to affect attitudes' (Board of Secondary Education 1976, p. 242). In their assumption of media power and the conviction that media studies might act as an antidote to such power, the syllabuses reflected the political defensiveness evident in the British programs of the time, which according to Buckingham were seen as a means of disabusing students of false beliefs and ideologies (Buckingham 1998). The syllabuses conceived of the audience as a passive recipient of 'media messages' delivered by a 'powerful media'. According to the syllabus, the aim of media studies was to enable the student to 'be more than a semi-passive receiver of messages' and one who, by the end of the course of study, would be able to 'identify the sender's motive' and 'evaluate it' (Board of Secondary Education 1976, p. 241). Thus, although the motivation for the subject was not the political protectionism Buckingham and others identified at work in Britain at the same time, similar concerns are evident in the syllabuses of the period.

However, far more influential on the actual practice of media studies teaching was the line in every iteration of the syllabuses that said students should 'learn by doing' and 'will develop from skills towards concepts' (Board of Secondary Education 1976, p. 244). The evidence drawn from 'unofficial' sources of data about the subject, namely teaching programs, subject newsletters and the like, shows that media studies was entirely focused on production. The subject newsletters celebrate grade six children 'processing their own slides', high schools converting washrooms into darkrooms, and students producing video plays, film animations and audio recordings (*Media*

Message 1975). It is clear from the early documents and interviews with teachers from the period that 'learning by doing' or practical work was the pre-eminent form of activity in the media studies classroom.

There were some lasting outcomes of the practice of making production central to the subject. To those not directly involved the subject looks like a low-status vocational subject with its emphasis on equipment, production of non-written outcomes and student activity. In contrast, high-status academic subjects are characterised by textbooks, reading lists, written outcomes and theoretical knowledge. As has been demonstrated by Layton (1973) and Goodson (1983), knowledge that has a practical orientation is held to be of lesser value than abstract knowledge. Arguably, the foregrounding of practical work is a key reason why the subject has failed to achieve recognition (despite repeated attempts) as a subject that might contribute to a student's tertiary entrance ranking.

Secondly, the focus on practical production significantly contributed to the development of a prevailing discourse that rendered the subject as 'fun' in the minds of students and teachers. Writing is not considered by most students as being inherently enjoyable and media studies was, in the seventies, a subject that demanded very little writing (or reading).

The discourse of fun

The attraction of the subject for those teachers who entered media studies in its earliest years appears to have been of two kinds. There were those who were lured by the alternative media studies posed to traditional chalk/talk, pen/paper teaching and learning. They embraced practical work because they believed it engaged students in a way that reading and writing did not. Teachers of that period, when interviewed for this study about their motivations for teaching media studies, responded in such terms as:

> I experienced kids daily who were turned off by chalk and talk. I liked the idea of using something other than books and writing implements. (Interview with Gill, an ex-media studies teacher, 25 September 1999)

> Media studies offered kids something more than just sitting and listening. They could express themselves in a different way; they could actually produce something. (Interview with Lyn, a current media studies teacher with fifteen years experience, 19 February 1999)
> For some of my students media studies was the only opportunity they had to succeed. They knew before they wrote a word that the best they

> could hope for was a C for their essay but these same students could shine when it came to producing an animation or a photograph. They loved it. (Interview with Laura, an ex-media studies teacher, 28 July 1999)

The other type of attraction presented by media studies was the potential it held for a teacher's personal pleasure. 'Fun' as a motive for becoming a media studies teacher figured prominently in the teachers' descriptions of their reasons for taking on the subject:

> I was always interested in visuals. I had wanted to be an art teacher and I had lots of friends in the media. I loved learning photography. (Interview with Sue, an ex-media studies teacher, 24 July 1999, Perth)

> The hands-on aspect appealed to me. I liked working with equipment. (Interview with Bob, a current media studies teacher, 16 July 1999, Perth)

> I did a professional development course and I thought it was a heap of fun. I learnt how to use a camera and develop my own films. I was hooked and could not wait to start a media studies course. (Interview with Peter, an ex-media studies teacher, 16 October 1998)

The 'fun' tag attached to media studies was partly promoted by the form and content of professional development available to those who wanted to introduce media studies into their classrooms. Professional development focused on instruction in using the tools of the media. The 'learning by doing' approach had permeated all levels of media education including professional development in the area. Every aspect of the production process had to be undertaken by the teachers themselves, from rolling off 35mm from bulk loaders into cassettes, to mixing the chemicals, to processing the negatives and finally printing the photographs. This emphasis on practical production in media workshops affected the type of teachers who became engaged in the area. In the seventies it was mainly those who saw themselves as having some interest and expertise in technical production who attended the professional development courses. They in turn trained other colleagues in the same skills and all engaged in similar activities with their students.

Fun, then, whether it be student or teacher pleasure, became a major element of the discourse of media studies. The association of media studies with fun was in part inevitable given that its major objects of study – film, television and radio – have themselves the status of fun. As books are associated with serious topics so the media

are associated with entertainment. But the fun discourse was further nurtured by those involved in the field and for many became the reason to join the media studies ranks (and for others to make a decision not to join).

Thus the syllabuses' representation of a monolithic all-powerful media did not match the reality of local practice. Media studies, as realised in the classroom, favoured production over the analysis of media power and constructed its object of study as an object of pleasure rather than fear. In the practice of media studies learning how to do the media was given priority over learning about the media.

Into the eighties and the science of the text

The next phase of media education was marked by what Aronwitz and Giroux label 'the science of the text', in which contemplation of an image became an occasion for the display of methodological skill (1991, p. 142). In this phase knowledge in media studies took on a precision previously lacking. The curricula of this period (mid-eighties to the mid-nineties) reflected the influence of the British cultural studies theorists of the Birmingham School. The central organising concept of a linear chain of communication (sender-message-medium-receiver) which had marked earlier syllabuses was discarded in favour of something that resembled Stuart Hall's 'encoding/decoding model' (1980). In this model the media is conceived of as an agent in the construction of social reality and the audience as an active participant in the construction of textual meaning. Curriculum documents of the period required students to 'identify significant elements of selection of film and television with particular reference to montage, technical, symbolic, written and audio codes' (Secondary Education Authority (SEA) 1987, p. 157).

These objectives required a detailed analysis of individual texts in order to identify individual shots (montage), visual symbols and variations in the musical score. Such analysis was made possible by technical improvements in video recorders, for example the freeze-frame facility of domestic video machines meant that it was now possible to hold a single image from a film and pour over it at length.

A notable aspect of this transformation in what constituted knowledge in media studies in this period was the level of difficulty of the courses. Course objectives required, unlike any earlier versions, that students be cognizant with 'theories of media analysis' and 'significant developments in Australian history that have affected the media being studied' (SEA 1987, p. 158). Students were expected to understand relatively complex concepts of realism, genre, authorship and representation, none of which were mentioned in earlier course outlines. Furthermore, the 1980s introduced a more sophisticated and difficult vocabulary related to these concepts. The extent

and impact of the changes from 1976 to 1986 are neatly captured in the words of one teacher:

> there has been an alarming tendency away from 'hands-on' as the theoretical content of our media courses has expanded to include such (unheard of in 1976) concepts as narrative, rhetoric, myth and metonymy. (McMahon 1986, p. 3)

The course changes in this period can be seen as an attempt to redefine the subject in more theoretical terms, to make it more intellectually rigorous and less practical. For the first time authorised knowledge in media studies took on a precision that it had not previously had. The visual text was no longer an ephemeral phenomenon. It had become an object that could be captured, held motionless, subjected to meticulous attention and then mapped in terms of its codes: symbolic, technical and audio. The content and form of images had become subject to new rules of classification: realist–non-realist, narrative–non-narrative. The syllabuses, with their inclusion of more complex theories and language of visual images, constructed media studies as a special world with its own specialist content and vocabulary. Young (1976) argues that such a representation of the subject is characteristic of high-status subjects that seek to emphasise their abstractness from everyday life (pp. 53–4). In the case of media studies it was an attempt to capture status through the imposition of a more rigorously academic curriculum.

This transformation in subject knowledge was motivated by the fervent wish of adherents of the subject to improve its status within the curriculum. It was made possible by a radical change in the staffing of the subject which saw graduates of university communications courses entering teaching. Ivor Goodson makes the point that the evolution of a school subject from a utilitarian or pedagogic version to an academic version is not an uncommon route. He argues that subject teachers and administrators use curriculum change as a way to increase the material or symbolic resources available to them. It was, he says, the course adopted by both geography and biology in England (Goodson 1983, p.192). In his case studies of these subjects he traces the actions by which teachers and promoters of the subjects strove to attain academic respectability. This, he says, involves having their subject included in the body of externally examinable subjects and ensuring the employment of only specialist teachers trained in the discipline at university level.

A strong push to make the subject more academic came from those teachers who sought to have the subject listed as one that would count for university entrance. Media studies was seen by many practitioners in the field as the poor relation in the school subject family. A teacher interviewed for this study said:

> I always had the feeling that there was always a need to justify ourselves, very much with the administration of the school and very much with other teachers. We were trying to justify our own existence by trying to get some sort of tertiary recognition of the course so there was a lot of rigour in our examination of the theoretical basis of media studies. (Interview with Warren, one of the first media studies teachers in Western Australia, 16 August 1999)

Other interviewees who taught media studies in the 1980s described themselves as 'battling every year for a slot on the timetable' or 'totally ignored by the administration until they wanted some glossy pictures to show at speech night', and described media studies as a 'dumping ground'. This last point was made in different and more politic ways by a number of teachers interviewed for this study. They seemed to have forgotten that media studies had its origins in the belief of senior educational policy makers that less academically able students deserved a curriculum that suited their needs.

The intellectualisation of the media studies syllabuses was made possible by the entry of a new type of media studies teacher. In this period, for the first time, new teachers entering media studies had a university background in communication and film theory and were conversant with such theories as semiotics and structuralism. Increased student numbers had created a market for media studies trained teachers and staffing requirements could no longer be met by having an existing teacher switch disciplines as had happened in the past. New teachers were drawn from a pool of trained graduates who entered the subject with alternative conceptions of what might constitute media studies.

However, the terrain of media studies was fractured. In the eighties competing versions of the subject co-existed. Resistance to the intellectualisation of the curriculum was marked and strong. Despite the promotion of an academic discourse of media studies by the writers of the curriculum documents and the adoption of textual analysis as the favoured activity by new teachers, classroom practices and classroom knowledge about the media remained largely unchanged in many schools. Resistance on the part of teachers to the adoption of a more academic version of media studies came in the form of 'more of the same', a determination on the part of most teachers to continue doing what they knew and loved. In this resolve they were supported by the local subject association, the Australian Teachers of Media (WA). The subject association took over responsibility for professional development in 1981 and continued the tradition of training teachers in media production skills. It continued to affirm the value of practical media production by holding regular festivals of student work in film, video and photography. More pointed resistance to

the intellectualisation of the subject is evident in the subject association newsletter. It regularly satirised the complexity of the concepts of the syllabus and the obscurity of its jargon. The publication, in late 1986, of an 'Alternative Media Studies Examination', reproduced in part below, demonstrates how teachers hijacked the academic discourse of cultural studies for their own purposes of critique:

'An understanding of the ideological function of signs is a necessary pre-requisite for any analysis of the products of the capitalist media.' Discuss with reference to the fact that Joan Collins is a Pisces.
Write an essay on either the adaptation of the narrative techniques of the classic realist novel to the films of Eisenstein or how Jane Fonda manages to look so young.
Many people would argue that McLuhan's prediction of a 'global village' has now been achieved. Explain which of the following deserves to be seen as the global village idiot: Ronald Reagan, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Prince Andrew, Clive James or George 'The Animal' Steele.
Which is more difficult: trying to understand French semioticians or deciding whether to watch *Sale of the Century*? (*Atom News* 1986)

The relatively low status of the subject meant that it was subject to minimal accountability. There were no external examinations, no heads of department, and no mechanism to ensure that teachers adhered to the requirements of the syllabus. Teachers could continue to teach what they wished for the most part, regardless of the demands of the syllabus, so media production continued to dominate classroom practice supplemented occasionally by textual analysis.

The generation of an academic discourse at the bureaucratic level and the maintenance of a production discourse at the classroom level, and the failure of either to wipe out the other, points to the intricacies of the relationship between power and knowledge. Those who have power, the curriculum writers, generate the kind of knowledge they need to maintain their power, which in this case was academic knowledge. At the same time those who are, or seek to avoid being, subject to this power need their own alternative kinds of knowledge to resist. The teachers maintained their commitment to classroom-based production and constructed events like the film festivals in which they could publicly affirm the value of this sort of knowledge.

Recent times: media studies post-2000

Across the English-speaking world, the nineties saw the introduction of a reform agenda for education. In response to the vast increase in numbers of students remaining in school beyond the compulsory years of schooling, publicly expressed fears of falling standards and a widespread concern about the employability of school leavers, there was a shift in the discourse of educational policy (Australian Education Council 1991, pp. 57–8). The desire for a socially just and equitable society, which characterised the period that saw the introduction of media studies (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission 1973), was replaced by a new discourse built around a 'vision of an economically competitive and industrially restructured society in which economic imperatives drive the education of all young Australians' (Poole 1992, p. 2). A new vocabulary of terms entered educational discourse, terms like pathways, destinations, competencies, employment outcomes and 'general vocational education' (Australian Education Council 1991, p. 7). The purpose of post-compulsory education was just that: it should have a clearly defined purpose which was that it should lead toward an eventual employment outcome (but not a specific occupation). The role of schools should be to provide students with the competencies to enter the workforce but not give them 'narrow, occupation-specific skills' (Australian Education Council 1991, p. 115). The new discourse was slowly realised through various strategies such as the abolition of unemployment benefits for under eighteen year olds, the introduction of financial support for needy upper secondary students and the introduction of a new curriculum model in upper secondary education.

It might have been expected that media studies would fare poorly now that a belief in education as fulfilling the needs of students for 'personal growth and identity has been converted into an instrumental definition of education in terms of the needs of industry and the workforce' (Dwyer 1995, p. 469). In fact the subject has been able to exploit the functionalist discourse of education for its own ends. The introduction of a new curriculum model, the Common Assessment Framework, enabled media studies to revalidate its practices under the mantle of its metanarrative of production.

The Common Assessment Framework describes a competency-based curriculum model based on student outcomes, tasks for measuring the performance of students against intended outcomes, published criteria for grading performance and grading procedures for non-externally examined subjects, of which media studies is one. There is an economy of power in education which runs through 'the four message systems of education: curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and organization' (Ball 1994, p. 1). The Common Assessment Framework imposed itself upon each of these four message systems. It brought with it a new syllabus based on outcomes, a new form of assessment based on performance criteria and a new way of teaching and

organising the subject in the form of tasks. It is the model's concept of the assessment task, designed to 'measure student demonstration of outcomes' against 'well-defined performance criteria' (Curriculum Council of WA 1998, p. 1), which has assured the maintenance of traditional ways of teaching media studies in a reformed curriculum. Although the central education authority sets task guidelines and publishes sample tasks, teachers are at liberty to design their own particular tasks for students within the guidelines. For example in order to demonstrate the outcome 'Understand patterns of construction in a range of media texts' (Curriculum Council of WA 1999) students are required to:

> Create and construct a media product demonstrating an understanding of technical codes and conventions. You will produce either the front page of a magazine or a short instructional video on the use of codes and conventions. (Curriculum Council of WA 1999)

The discourse of production that has permeated media studies since its inception has at last become a central authoritative and mandated requirement of the curriculum. While the discourse has been retained it has at the same time been transformed in order to accommodate historical pressures. Whereas once practical production was legitimated on the basis that it contributed to learning it has been transformed into an outcome of their learning. No longer are students required to learn about the media by performing a task but rather they are now expected to use a task to demonstrate that which they have learned. In the earlier 'learning by doing' application of the discourse of production process was pre-eminent over product, but under the Common Assessment Framework model the product is the goal of the task. Practical work is no longer primarily the means by which students gain an understanding of how the media work but the means by which they produce a media product as evidence of their knowledge.

Conclusion

An analysis of the discourses of education and politics circulating immediately prior to the introduction of media studies in schools revealed a microculture not only ready but anxious to introduce a certain type of new subject into the school curriculum. By the early seventies secondary school education in WA was shifting from being a system designed to channel the most able individuals upwards and onwards into university while discarding the rest, into a system designed to embrace all. Such a systemic change required the introduction of new subjects, of the kind that might cater for the wide range of ability levels entering and staying in secondary education. That one of the new subjects to be invented and implemented was media studies was the chance result of the intersection of these new demands on the secondary

education system with other forces, both within and without the education sector. The impetus for the subject did not lie in a distrust of the media or worries about its effects but in concerns about the need for curriculum reform. Media studies was a means by which less academically able students could be administered, organised and kept occupied. From the beginning media studies did not display the organising principles underlying the academic curriculum identified by Young (1971, p. 38) as an emphasis on the written as opposed to the oral; on the individual rather than the group; and on the abstraction rather than the application of knowledge.

Once established the subject was formed by, and contributed to, specific discourses around its purpose, conduct and goals. These discourses worked through both the process of syllabus development and classroom practice. Ideological emancipation figured prominently in early versions of the syllabus, while pedagogical emancipation conditioned the practice of the subject. In practice, the subject offered an alternative to the repressive and irrelevant curriculum that had traditionally constrained the post-compulsory years of schooling through the use of such (then) progressive practices as learning contracts, group work and non-classroom-based learning. In most schools, during the early years of the subject, the media studies classroom was deliberately constructed to look and feel different to other classrooms. Posters and advertisements adorned the walls; bean bags replaced desks, popular music provided background sound and students moved freely between work areas. Within this discourse of emancipation learning, motivation and satisfaction were assumed to be ends in themselves while the issue of what should be learnt or satisfied remained vague and uncertain.

Alongside the discourse of emancipation there developed a discourse of pleasure that created the subject as a site in which teachers and students could expect to enjoy themselves. The sources of pleasure were both the content and activity of the learning. Media studies employed and valorised entertainment texts and students' knowledge and understanding of popular culture. Horror films, soap operas, comics and pop music were legitimate objects of study, and familiarity with the popular was viewed as a worthwhile attribute in a student. In its routines media studies favoured viewing over reading, and doing over writing. For both teachers and students, the 'doing' of media studies, that is the production of media texts, was a primary source of pleasure in the subject. The dominance and enduring nature of this discourse has ensured that practical work has remained central to the subject throughout its history.

Questions of subject knowledge have been central to this genealogy of a school subject: what constitutes knowledge at any time and how and why does it change? The study has found first that subject knowledge as it is defined by the syllabus and subject knowledge as it is defined in the classroom are very often not the same thing.

Knowledge changes not because new discoveries are made (for example, audience theory did not discover audiences any more than textual criticism produced texts) but because there is a shift of forces that results in a new appropriation of knowledge and thus a new set of interpretations that become the truth. Changes in the knowledge base of media studies have been contingent upon changes in the teaching cohort, in power relations and in the broader educational context.

This history has revealed the most striking characteristic of media education to be not evolution but repetition. Through every iteration of the media studies syllabuses from 1976 up to the present day one can identify a refashioning of the original 'learning by doing' refrain. For example, the current syllabus requires that four out of the seven required assessment tasks in Year 11 and three of the six at Year 12 be student productions (Curriculum Council of WA 1999, p. 25). Equally, classroom practice reveals the same repetition whereby the central concern of teachers and students continues to be with the production of media artifacts. Superficially at least, the activities of a media studies class in 1999 resemble very closely those of a class twenty years earlier. While the equipment is more plentiful little else appears to have changed in media studies teaching in nearly thirty years. Classroom observations made for this study confirm that group work is still the favoured organisational structure and production is still the goal of nearly every activity. But whereas once practical work was thought of as an input, a means by which students would come to understand the workings of the mass media, it is now conceived of as an output of the teaching and learning process. Media production nowadays is the way in which students are given 'opportunities to apply their understandings' and 'demonstrate their performance on a range of subject outcomes' (Curriculum Council of WA 1999, p. 23). This statement is not simply, as Foucault says, 'the repetition of what they once might have said' (Foucault 1973a, p. xv) but a reconceptualisation of the function of practical work within media studies. The prevailing discourse of outcomes-based education has shaped the object of which it speaks.

Hopefully, this short history has raised a sensitivity to the values historically embedded in the present reality. It might suggest to teachers ways to 'know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known' (Foucault 1985, p. 9). Media studies teachers claim to be dissatisfied with their lot but it is within their power to change the look and feel of their subject. Their adherence to the twin discourses of production and fun may be the bond that they need to break.

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